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SUMMARY

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2. BACKGROUND. Mr. David Boyd has been notified by the Journal of Daoist Studies that a paper he recently submitted has been accepted for publication in the forthcoming Feb. 2014 issue.
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Description:

The 4th century CE saw the rise of two distinct forms of Daoism: Shangqing and Lingbao. Rarely in the history of religion have two traditions emerged in such close temporal and geographical proximity to one another. This proximity created fierce competition for patronage and prestige. This article examines the ways in which the emergent Lingbao tradition sought to assert its superiority over its neighboring Shangqing rival in ancient China.

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3. DISCUSSION. N/A

4. VIEWS OF OTHERS. N/A

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Dr. Ismenia Sales de Souza, Director of Research, USAF
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1 tab
paper

**The “Other” Dao in Town:
Early Lingbao Polemics on Shangqing**

By David Boyd

Introduction

What attention has been paid to the issue of Daoist polemics has tended to focus on the conflict and competition of the Buddho-Daoist debates involving northern Celestial Masters during the Northern Wei 北魏 (386-534 C.E.¹) recorded in 520, the Northern Zhou 北周 (557-588) in 570 and reoccurring in the Tang Dynasty with the debates of the Daoist Fu Yi 傅奕 in 621-23 and Li Zhongqing 李仲卿 held in 626.² However, as Erik Zürcher has noted these often contemptuous and accusatory anti-Buddhist polemics are surprisingly absent from early Daoist scriptures.³

On the contrary, Zürcher has observed that polemics in early Daoist scriptures are unilaterally concerned with issues of “orthodoxy” and internal conduct.⁴ Stephen R. Bokenkamp has similarly noted that the frequency with which early writers address issues such issues in the early period “attests to a fairly high level of anxiety concerning questions of self-definition.”⁵ This is not surprising, given that Michel Strickman has argued that the term Daoism “has been pressed into service to qualify a highly disparate assortment of phenomena” and has proposed instead the idea of “various” Daoisms.⁶ Is it surprising, then, that these disparate traditions were in competition with each other?

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all dates hereafter are from the “Common Era” (C.E.).

² For an introduction to these debates see Livia Kohn ed., *Daoism Handbook* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 287-88; For a detailed study see Kohn, *Laughing at the Tao: Debates Among Buddhists and Taoists in Medieval China* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

³ Erik Zürcher, “Buddhist Influences on Early Taoism,” *T’oung-pao* 66 (1980), p. 89.

⁴ Erik Zürcher, “Buddhist Influences on Early Taoism,” *T’oung-pao* 66 (1980), p. 89.

⁵ Stephen R. Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 11.

⁶ Michel Strickman, “The Mao-shan Revelations: Taoism and the Aristocracy,” *T’oung-pao* 63 (1977), p. 1; cf. Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, pp. 10-11.

Ironically, the very use of the label “Daoism” has had a homogenizing effect on our understanding of the internal relations of the various traditions subsumed by it and has served to smooth over internal competition with a thin veneer of semantic unity. This thin semantic veneer masks the historical competition over just who should rightly be called Daoist.⁷ In regards to Daoist polemics, then, an even more important field of inquiry, one that has hitherto been largely unstudied but that may yet yield profound insights into the early conflicts and competition of different Chinese religious movements commonly labeled, or rather, aspiring to be labeled as “Daoist” movements that sought to position themselves as local and regional “orthodoxies,” is the internal polemics of the various Daoisms.⁸

A prime example is the relationship between the Daoisms practiced in southeastern China during the second half of the 4th century C.E., which had a profound and far reaching impact on the development of both Daoism and Chinese religion.

Stephen R. Bokenkamp has observed:

During the latter half of the 4th century, the prefectural town of Jurong, just southeast of modern Nanjing, was the scene of a series of events which were to redirect the course of China’s indigenous higher religion and lay the foundations for the Daoist canon.⁹

⁷ This is not simply an issue of the inaccuracy of Western classificatory nomenclature, but is rather the result of a cursory reading of the various traditions that were each asserting themselves as the “true Daoists.” Thus, the term “Daoist,” far from being a label of common membership was, in the early period, a fiercely contested category over which wars of orthodoxy were waged; cf. Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, p. 11; Rolf Stein, “Religious Taoism and Popular Religion from the Second to the Seventh Centuries,” in Holmes Welch & Anna Seidel, eds., *Facets of Taoism: Essays in Chinese Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 53-81.

⁸ For a detailed consideration of the disparate conceptual frameworks of religion in China and the West see, Robert F. Campany, “On the Very Idea of Religions (in the Modern West and Early Medieval China),” *History of Religions* 42.4 (2003), pp. 287-319.

⁹ Stephen R. Bokenkamp, “Sources of Ling-pao Scriptures,” in Michel Strickman ed., *Tantric and Taoist Studies in Honor of R.A. Stein* (Bruxelles: Institut belge des hautes études chinoises, 1981-1983), vol. 2, p. 434; Romanization modified to standard pinyin here and throughout.

This “series of events” revolves around the emergence of two distinct movements, the first, the Shangqing 上清 “Highest Clarity” or “Supreme Purity” tradition, and a few decades later, the Lingbao 靈寶, or “Numinous Treasure,” each promoting a radically different worldview and modality of practice. Though it is not uncommon for new religious movements to emerge in response to established religious traditions, such as the emergence of Christianity and Islam in lieu of Judaism or the emergence of Buddhism and Jainism amidst the backdrop of Brahmanic and Vedic traditions, and while new religious ideologies are scarcely created *ex nihilo* in a spiritual void, what is unique about these southern Chinese movements is the close temporal and geographical proximity in which they emerged. Indeed, Bokenkamp has argued:

The appearance of a second collection of divinely-inspired scriptures in Jurong within only twenty-seven years of the last entries in the Shangqing corpus (370) is a somewhat surprising phenomenon.¹⁰

More than surprising, perhaps nowhere else in the history of world religions have two distinct scriptural canons emerged in such close proximity to one another. How did this proximity influence the ways in which the emerging Lingbao movement responded to its neighbor Shangqing, literally the other Daoism in town? Regarding constructs of otherness, J.Z. Smith has insightfully proposed:

‘Otherness,’ it is suggested, is a matter of relative rather than absolute difference. Difference is not a matter of comparison between entities judged to be equivalent; rather difference most frequently entails a hierarchy of prestige and ranking. Such distinctions are found to be drawn most sharply between ‘near neighbors,’ with respect to what has been termed the ‘proximate other.’¹¹

¹⁰ Bokenkamp, “Sources,” p. 442.

¹¹ J.Z. Smith, “What a Difference a Difference Makes,” In J. Neusner and E. S. Frerichs eds., *To See Ourselves as Others see us: “Christians, Jews, “Others” in Late Antiquity* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985), p. 15.

In examining the “sharp distinctions” drawn between “near neighbors” commonly labeled Daoist, the existence of polemics directed toward internal orthodoxy and orthopraxis betrays a “proximate” otherness. Thus otherness becomes central to internal polemics. Smith has further argued:

“‘otherness’ is an ambiguous category. This is so because it is necessarily a term of interrelation. ‘Otherness’ is not so much a matter of separation as it is a description of interaction.... the relation to the ‘other’ is a matter of shifting temporality and relative modes of relationship.”¹²

Understanding the “other” in Daoist polemics, then, will increase our understanding of the interactions and “relative modes of relationships” between the proponents and subjects of early internal Daoist polemics. Therefore, this study examines the complex attitudes of the Lingbao scriptures toward the Shangqing tradition and presents the often overlooked Lingbao “polemic” against the “proximate other” Daoism in town. Before moving onto that discussion, however, it is first necessary to develop a taxonomical rubric for a study of Lingbao polemics.

Defining Polemics

In her recent book *Hidden Polemics in Biblical Narrative*, Yairah Amit of Tel Aviv University recounts the warfare etymology of the word “polemic” in the Greek πόλεμος, meaning “war” or “military confrontation” and documents its metaphorical use in polemical rhetoric, suggesting:¹³

¹² J.Z. Smith, “What a Difference a Difference Makes,” p. 10.

¹³ Yairah Amit, *Hidden Polemics in Biblical Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), Jonathan Chipman trans., pp. 6-7; For reviews see H.G.M Williamson, “Hidden Polemics in Biblical Narrative,” *Vetus testamentum* vol. 52 (2002), no. 4, p. 560 and David Marcus, “Hidden Polemics in Biblical Narrative,” *Biblical Interpretation* vol. 12 (2004), no. 3, pp. 324-326.

The argument articulated within a text defined as polemical, and pertaining to some war of ideas, is intended to strengthen or to reject an explicit or covert position taken by that text ...¹⁴

Thus, by a “polemical discourse” or Lingbao polemic I mean a divisive discourse or recurring set of discursive structures throughout the Lingbao texts that argue for and assert the superiority and primacy of the doctrines, practices, and worldview of the Numinous Treasure, in this case, in opposition to and at the expense of its neighborhood rival Shangqing. This type of discourse tends to promote, respond to, and/or anticipate internal contention, conflict, and controversy, as opposed to an irenical discourse, which may be defined as “tending to promote peace,” especially in relation to theological or ecclesiastical differences.”¹⁵

Amit explores the phenomena of religious polemics in Hebrew Biblical literature, distinguishing between explicit, implicit, and hidden polemics. She defines an explicit polemic as a polemic in which both the subject and the stance taken are directly mentioned, leaving no question for the reader.¹⁶ An example of this kind of polemic is, “peaches are bad,” which leaves no doubt as to the author’s stance toward peaches. An implicit polemic directly states its subject, but indirectly states its stance through a variety of components.¹⁷ To modify our former example: “peaches are fruit, fruit decays, decay is sickness, sickness is bad,” in which the subject is directly stated, but the stance only emerges through a series of associative components. Once the chain of associations is forged, the polemic becomes clear to the reader.¹⁸ The third type of polemic Amit

¹⁴ Amit, *Hidden Polemics*, p. 7.

¹⁵ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (1989), online edition, <http://dictionary.oed.com>.

¹⁶ Amit, *Hidden Polemics*, p. 56.

¹⁷ Amit, *Hidden Polemics*, p. 57.

¹⁸ This is, obviously, a grossly simplistic example. In a more complex implicit polemic the statements need not appear sequentially, but may be scattered throughout a text like clues for the reader to find.

identifies is the concealed or hidden polemic, which she defines as a polemic in which the subject is not explicitly mentioned or that is mentioned in an unexpected formulation.¹⁹

In a hidden polemic the subject is camouflaged while the stance may be executed in either an explicit or implicit manner. Thus, the relationship between the stance and the subject can only be discerned through certain clues within the text.²⁰ Amit explains:

Through various hints, the reader is left with the feeling that a double effort has been made within the text: on the one hand – to conceal the subject of the polemic, that is, to avoid its explicit mention; on the other – to leave certain traces within the text (referred to below as “signs”) that through various means will lead the reader to the hidden subject of the polemic. The signs serve as both ruses to bypass explicit mention of the subject.²¹

Amit proposes that such hidden polemics possess a rhetorical persuasion that removes initial opposition to a stance that might not be accepted if stated explicitly while creating an accumulating residue, guiding the reader to the final stance:

The hidden polemic is like a fine rain, whose accumulated drops create a suitable background and preparatory framework for the reader’s discovery ...²²

Amit argues that this kind of polemic carries far greater persuasive power, as it subtly redirects the reader away from the conclusion they anticipate toward the as yet undiscovered polemic. I have found her rubric quite useful for understanding polemics and therefore use it as a point of departure for my analysis and discussion of specific passages containing Lingbao polemics against Shangqing with one final caution from Amit:

¹⁹ Amit, *Hidden Polemics*, p. 93.

²⁰ Amit, *Hidden Polemics*, p. 93. The complexity and covert nature of such “hidden polemics” makes their reduction into a simplistic example such as the peach above difficult. To uncover a hidden polemic against peaches would require a close reading of the text, which would through a variety of clues eventually lead one, without explicitly stating the subject, to the conclusion that peaches were somehow bad.

²¹ Amit, *Hidden Polemics*, p. 97.

²² Amit, *Hidden Polemics*, p. 97.

... polemics, with the various stances represented, are not presented as systematic discussion, within which one may distinguish a theoretical level, a sequence of arguments, or at least a summarizing presentation of the problem.... Moreover, in a text presenting a polemic or a polemical stance, the parts frequently do not add up to a unified statement; rather, the various stances are intertwined with one another ...²³

The lack of systematic presence of polemical stances and their intertwining nature is an important observation to keep in mind for examining Lingbao polemics. Furthermore, Amit understands the emergence of polemics as “an expression of a variety of ideological struggles” reflecting the processes of cultural and religious formation and struggle, the temporal continuation of which “constitutes the framework for the existence of polemics and polemical writing.”²⁴ As such, the story, and therefore the polemic, is grounded in the early medieval Chinese cultural history that shaped elite society in the south and formed the backdrop for the interactions of several aristocratic families in Jurong in the 4th century C.E.

Historical Background

Following the sacking of the Western Jin Dynasty (265-317) capital of Luoyang by a confederation of nomadic Xiongnu 匈奴 tribes in 317, northern elite émigrés led by remnants of the Jin court fled south, relocating the capital to east of the Yangze in Jiankang 建康 (south of modern Nanjing city in Jiangsu Province) and establishing the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420). This forced emigration resulted in bitter factional struggles between the northern émigrés and the long established southern aristocratic

²³ Amit, *Hidden Polemics*, p. 26.

²⁴ Amit, *Hidden Polemics*, p. 3.

families.²⁵ More significantly for our purposes, the northern émigrés brought with them northern Celestial Masters Daoism, which had spread throughout the north under both the Wei 魏 (220-265) and the Jin Dynasties following the pious surrender of Zhang Lu 張魯 (fl. 191-215)²⁶ to the Wei General Cao Cao 曹操 (155-220) in 215, and which immediately set out to subdue popular southern religious cults.²⁷

In the wake of this spiritual and political colonization, Strickman has argued that the religious situation was quite tense, with southern practitioners launching aggressive spiritual campaigns against their new overlords.²⁸ In the midst of this tenuous spiritual confrontation, southern converts to northern Celestial Master Daoism first assimilated, and within a few generations began to produce comprehensive spiritual syntheses of the northern import with indigenous southern practice, “forging a spiritual counterforce in their interest.”²⁹ Thus, both the Shangqing and Lingbao movements represent southern responses to Celestial Master incursions, which synthesized it with aspects of Buddhism and popular southern practices.

Synthesis vs. Influence

Since Zürcher’s article, “Buddhist Influences on Early Taoism” began circulating in 1980, it has become common to speak of “Buddhist influence” in regards to Daoism and popular Chinese religion. However, while the impact of Buddhism on the religious landscape of China is undeniable, the directionality implied by the term “influence” is

²⁵ For a fuller treatment of this struggle see, Strickman, “The Mao-shan Revelations,” pp. 6-7.

²⁶ For issues regarding the date of Zhang Lu’s death, which may be as early as 216 C.E. or as late as 252 C.E., see Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, pp. 150-51, 161-62, notes 6 & 7.

²⁷ Strickman, “The Mao-shan Revelations,” p. 7.

²⁸ Strickman, “The Mao-shan Revelations,” p. 7.

²⁹ Strickman, “The Mao-shan Revelations,” p. 8-12.

somewhat misleading, particularly in the case of Lingbao.³⁰ Bokenkamp has provided a thorough analysis of this of “influence,” revising Zürcher’s terminology and arguing that to “properly assess Buddhist elements in the early Lingbao corpus, we must avoid simplistic notions of ‘influence’” and “focus analytical attention on the ‘appropriating system.’”³¹ Kristopher Schipper has similarly argued that the nature of the Lingbao scriptures is far more complex than simple Buddhist “influence,” arguing instead for a “multiple synthesis” of old southern traditions with the liturgical institutions of the northern Celestial Masters and Buddhist doctrines with “the most traditional and ancient cosmology of China proper.”³² Elsewhere, Schipper has noted that the Lingbao scriptures synthesized Buddhism primarily by liturgical integration based on southern traditions not through doctrinal blending.³³ A proper understanding of this directionality is thus extremely important, not only for Lingbao but for later Daoist developments as well. Bokenkamp has noted:

With their synthetic concerns, the Lingbao scriptures prefigure the unifying trend that was to characterize the Daoism of the following centuries. This trend was continued by Lu Xiuqing (406-477) ... From this point on, the traditions we have been discussing were merged, at least conceptually, and we can begin speaking of a unified Daoist religion.³⁴

³⁰ Though Zürcher’s article is quite nuanced in its treatment, acknowledging that terms such as “influence” and “borrowing” are vague and cover a wide variety of phenomena (Zürcher, p. 86), a certain reductionist mentality has resulted in an un-nuanced use of the term, implying that the various forms of Daoism were passive recipients of the “Buddhist conquest of China.” However, nothing could be further from the truth and Zürcher’s article was designed to open discussion on the topic not to serve as the capstone of the investigation.

³¹ Bokenkamp, “The Silk-worm and Bodhi Tree: The Lingbao Attempt to Replace Buddhism in China and Our Attempt to Place Lingbao Daoism,” in John Lagerway ed., *Religion and Chinese Society, Volume 1: Ancient China* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2004), pp. 317-340.

³² Kristofer Schipper & Franciscus Verellen eds., *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang* (London & Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), vol. 1: Antiquity through the Middle Ages, p. 14.

³³ Schipper, *The Taoist Canon*, p. 212.

³⁴ Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, p. 9.

The Lingbao scriptures, then, set a precedent for incorporating Buddhist elements that would become a hallmark of later, more unified Daoist traditions. This notion of synthesis advanced variously by Strickman, Bokenkamp, and Schipper more accurately points to the active role played by the Chinese in the selective adoption and reformulation of Buddhist elements into Lingbao.

The Origins of Shangqing and Emergence of Lingbao

When Xu Mai 許邁 (b. 301) and Xu Mi 許謐 (303-73) hired the spirit-medium Yang Xi 楊羲 (330-386?) to contact the latter's wife, Tao Kedou 陶科斗, who had died in 362, to determine the cause of some unexplained illnesses and misfortunes in the family, she introduced them to a hitherto unknown spiritual realm and its glorified denizens, one of whom was Lady Wei Huacun (251-334), a former Celestial Master libationer, and inaugurated a new era of religious development. During the years 364 to 370, Yang Xi received regular midnight visitations and revelations from Lady Wei and other female Perfected for his Xu family patrons and their intimates. Among the close friends and family who submitted questions for the Perfected Beings to Yang Xi and the Xu family was Ge Chaofu 葛巢甫. Chaofu was a direct descendent of the famous would-be alchemist Ge Hong 葛洪 (283-413) and the renowned transcendent Ge Xuan 葛玄 (Ge Xiaoxian 葛孝先). Moreover, he was also closely related by marriage to the Xu family.³⁵ It has also been suggested that he was "an active member of the nascent Shangqing community."³⁶ As such, Bokenkamp has observed:

³⁵ For more on the marital ties between the Ge and Xu families, see Bokenkamp, "Sources," pp. 445-446.

³⁶ Yamada Toshiaki, "The Lingbao School," in Livia Kohn ed., *Daoism Handbook*, p. 225.

It is natural that members of the Ge family should have formulated questions concerning the otherworldly status of the one member of their family to have gained local renown as a transcendent, Ge Xuan.³⁷

So it was no surprise that Yang Xi inquired of the Perfected regarding Ge Xuan. What is striking, however, is the response he received from them:

Regarding your inquiry into Ge Xuan, Xuan excels at transformation yet is clumsy at employing his body. Presently, he has only just attained deathlessness and that is all. He is not a transcendent being. When he was first at Mt. Chang, he entered Gaizhu. For his part, he is able to ride tigers and dispatch demons. There is nowhere he does not go, but he almost did not achieve any rank at all.³⁸

問葛玄，玄善於變幻而拙於用身。今正得不死而已。非僊人也。初在長山，近入蓋竹，亦能乘虎使鬼。無所不至，但幾於未得受職耳。³⁹

According to Ge Hong's hagiography of Ge Xuan contained in the *Shenxian zhuan* 神仙傳, Ge Xuan had the power to dispatch ghosts and demons, sit amidst fire without being burned, sit underwater without drowning, practice multilocation, transmute tree sap into fine liquor, and make animals dance, before he performed corpse-deliverance.⁴⁰ While, some of these elements are acknowledged in Yang Xi's response from the Perfected, the claim that Ge Xuan was not a transcendent and had only achieved deathlessness, literally, a state of not dying (*busi* 不死) and a low rank in the newly revealed Shangqing celestial bureaucracy must have been quite disconcerting.⁴¹ This is somewhat striking considering the longstanding marital ties between the two families and Robert Campany's observation that Ge Xuan plays a pivotal role in the filiation of some early scriptures

³⁷ Bokenkamp, "Sources," p. 442; Romanization modified.

³⁸ Cf. Bokenkamp, "Sources," p. 442.

³⁹ *Zhen Gao* 真誥 (HY 1010) 12.3a.7-9.

⁴⁰ For a translation and study of Ge Hong's hagiography of Ge Xuan in the *Shenxian zhuan*, see Robert F. Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth: A Translation and Study of Ge Hong's Traditions of Divine Transcendents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 152-159, 401-406.

⁴¹ Bokenkamp, "Sources," p. 442.

adopted by Shangqing.⁴² Nevertheless, it constitutes an explicit polemic against the spiritual heritage of the Ge family.

Moreover, as Strickman has already pointed out, the primary feature of the Shangqing revelations was “access to higher celestial regions” and “more exalted and powerful immortal intercessors.”⁴³ Aspects of their formulation seem to directly supplant the spiritual legacy of the Ge family:

The Perfected were far superior in rank (even as they were more highly refined in substance) to those other Immortals, mere *xian* 仙, whom it had been Ge Hong’s ambition to behold, and in due time join. Likewise the Heaven of Supreme Purity, Shangqing, was high above that of the Great Purity (Tai-qing 太清), whence the arcane methods inherited by Ge Hong purported to originate, and whither they promised to elevate their successful practitioner.⁴⁴

It seems that the Xu family was consciously trying to assert the superiority of their own spiritual pedigree over the longstanding heritage of the Ge family. For, in their formulation of Shangqing, or perhaps by means of the revelation of Shangqing by the Perfected, Yang Xi and the Xu family launched an implicit polemic against the Ge family that spatially and hierarchically subordinated the renowned ideals collected by Ge Hong beneath the newly revealed Shangqing Heavens and their Perfected. In addition to the explicit polemic against Ge Xuan, this “hierarchy of prestige” is critical to our understanding of the polemics of the Lingbao response, for Bokenkamp has argued:

Ge Chaofu asserted the celestial ascendancy of his family with its own arcane tradition against the rival claims of his neighbors. Because the Perfected had slighted his ancestors, for Ge Chaofu the Shangqing scriptures presented a skewed and partial picture of the celestial domain. He was well aware of the extent to which Shangqing texts served the

⁴² Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, p. 405.

⁴³ Strickman, “Mao-shan Revelations,” p. 9.

⁴⁴ Strickman, “Mao-shan Revelations,” p. 9. Romanization modified; For a study of Ge Hong’s ideas see, Chi-Tim Lai, “Ko Hung’s Discourse on *Hsien*-Immortality: A Taoist Configuration of an Alternate Ideal Self-Identity,” *Numen* 45 (1998): 183-220.

interests of Yang Xi and the Xu family, Yang's patrons, and he was ready to let the same principles operate in his own portrayal of celestial scenes. This awareness of the self-aggrandizement of the Shangqing scriptures suffuses Ge Chaofu's specific references to them.⁴⁵

If the Shangqing scriptures elevated the prestige of the Xu family in Jurong, then the Lingbao scriptures would do the same for the Ge family. Nor would Ge Chaofu forget the implicit and explicit Shangqing polemics launched against his spiritual heritage. As Bokenkamp has surmised:

It is difficult to imagine that the appearance of a rival canon in Jurong was not occasioned by a more earthly struggle between the representatives of the two traditions over sources of patronage and ultimate control in ministering to the needs of the region.⁴⁶

Thus, the stage was set for conflict and Lingbao polemics against Shangqing should be understood as stemming initially from this religious competition. Indeed, it appears that all was not well in the spiritual interactions of several prestigious families in Jurong. How did this conflict for spiritual control work itself into the early Lingbao corpus?⁴⁷

Nature of Lingbao Attitudes toward Shangqing

Isabelle Robinet has argued that the early Lingbao corpus adopted and preached the Shangqing texts, especially the *Dadong zhenjing*.⁴⁸ Livia Kohn has similarly

⁴⁵ Stephen R. Bokenkamp, "Sources," p. 443; Bokenkamp has recently stated that the attribution of the Lingbao scriptures to Ge Chaofu, "though historically attested" may be "fictive" and has proposed that for the Lingbao texts as a whole Ge Chaofu should "stand for author(s);" Bokenkamp, "The Prehistory of Laozi," pp. 407-8.

⁴⁶ Bokenkamp, "Sources," p. 448.

⁴⁷ By "early Lingbao corpus" I refer to the body of Lingbao texts catalogued by Lu Xiujing 陸修靜 (406-477) in the 5th century, reconstructed by Ōfuchi Ninji, based on a Tang Dynasty manuscript discovered at Dunhuang (P. 2256) and several corroborating passages in early encyclopedic texts; Ōfuchi Ninji, "On Ku Ling-pao ching," *Acta Asiatica* 27 (1974): 34-56. This reconstruction has been adopted by Bokenkamp, who also provides brief introductions to each text in an appendix; Bokenkamp, "Sources," pp. 479-484. I have identified each text from the corpus by their LB number in the corpus and their HY concordance number in parentheses. Unless otherwise stated all *juan* and line numbers are to the standard *Zhengtong Daozang* 正統道藏.

⁴⁸ Isabelle Robinet, *Taoism: Growth of a Religion* (Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 152.

suggested that the Shangqing texts were included by Ge Chaofu in the Lingbao scriptures.⁴⁹ Wang Chengwen has likewise argued that the early Lingbao scriptures absorbed the content of Shangqing scriptures and ceremonies on a large-scale while maintaining their great worth.⁵⁰ Given the competition between these two groups, it is important to examine the exact nature of their inclusion as well as the Lingbao attitudes governing their adoption. All of these statements are based on certain references to Shangqing in the Lingbao corpus, whose polemical contexts have been largely overlooked. Indeed, I will demonstrate below that such characterizations look at only the “camouflaged” portion of the covert polemics operating in the passage.⁵¹

Bokenkamp has presented a more nuanced assessment, observing that in the Lingbao corpus the Shangqing scriptures “are portrayed as authentic and valuable, but emanating from heavens lower than those in which the Lingbao texts are to be found and, worse yet, as having in some cases been transmitted to the world by female divinities.”⁵² His observation provides us with our first glimpse into a Lingbao polemic against Shangqing, one that asserts the hierarchical superiority of the origins of Lingbao over Shangqing as well as impugning the central means of their transmission to humanity.

⁴⁹ Livia Kohn, “Guarding the One: Concentrative Meditation in Taoism,” in Kohn & Sakade eds., *Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Center for Chinese Studies, 1989), p. 146.

⁵⁰ Wang Chengwen 王承文, *Dunhuang gu Lingbao jing yu Jin Tang Daojiao* 敦煌古靈寶經與晉唐道教 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), p. 213.

⁵¹ While Kohn and Robinet do not cite specific passages to back up their characterizations, I have only found a few specific references to Shangqing scriptures, specifically to the *Dadong zhenjing*, in the early Lingbao corpus and they are all part of either implicit or hidden polemics against Shangqing. Wang Chengwen’s evidence for his characterization will be discussed in detail below.

⁵² Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 377.

Lingbao Characterizations of Shangqing

How is Shangqing characterized in the early Lingbao corpus and what sorts of polemics can be discerned from those characterizations? The following five characterizations of Shangqing in relation to Lingbao may be identified in the early Lingbao corpus as constituting clear polemics against the Shangqing tradition of Yang Xi and the Xu family, which posited itself as a superior ideology over Ge Hong's alchemical traditions and slighted the stature of Ge Xuan:

- [1] Shangqing as spatially and hierarchically inferior to Lingbao.
- [2] Shangqing as Divulged Celestial Secrets.
- [3] Shangqing as a Proscribed Excellence in the Rhetoric of Praise.
- [4] Shangqing as a "Lesser Vehicle."
- [5] Lingbao as the Hidden Potency of Shangqing.

The five characterizations listed above constitute various types of Lingbao polemics against Shangqing discovered in the early Lingbao corpus that have hitherto been largely overlooked. Though such stances may not represent, as Amit observed for Biblical polemics, a unified statement against Shangqing, they seem inextricably intertwined with one another.

Shangqing as Spatially and Hierarchically Inferior to Lingbao

The first polemic, which implicitly asserts the superiority of Lingbao over Shangqing has already been noted by Bokenkamp. Just as Shangqing claimed that their heavens were higher than those known to the Celestial Masters, so to did this reasoning open the door for Lingbao to posit still higher heavens, loftier even than the Shangqing heavens. As Bokenkamp notes:

The Lingbao scriptures were composed to replace all previous spiritual knowledge with higher and more enduring truths. This they state quite explicitly from beginning to end.⁵³

Suffusing the Lingbao scriptures then is the claim that they relate “the workings of the Dao from highest antiquity through a new pantheon of deities held to be more ancient and thus more exalted than those described in earlier scriptural traditions.”⁵⁴ This is perhaps the most apparent of the Lingbao polemics and is implicit in nature. Any assertion of what Lingbao is must be understood in relation to what that means for the “other” Daoism, in this case, Shangqing. The formulation is quite simple and twofold in nature:

- [1] Lingbao emanates from the highest Heavens = Highest Truths
- [2] Lingbao deities reside in the highest Heavens = Most Exalted

By asserting that Lingbao possesses the highest truths from the highest heavens guarded and transmitted by the most exalted spiritual denizens, the superiority of Lingbao over any “other” formulation of Daoism, most proximately Shangqing, is clearly evident. Thus, without identifying Shangqing as inferior, the Lingbao scriptures have subordinated the heavens, deities, and truths of their Shangqing rivals. This polemic is so pervasive and uncontroversial as to require no further elaboration here.

Shangqing as Divulged Celestial Secrets

The second polemic insinuates the improper transmission of sacred celestial texts into the world by the Shangqing female Perfected to the Xu family. It constitutes a very subtle hidden polemic, in which Shangqing is, again never explicitly condemned or even mentioned as the prime example of “leaking” sacred scriptures into the world.

⁵³ Stephen R. Bokenkamp, “The Pre-history of Laozi: His Prior Career as a Woman in the Lingbao Scriptures,” *Cahiers d'Extreme Asie*, vol. 14 (2004), p. 408.

⁵⁴ Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, p. 9.

Nevertheless, the reader gets a sense that the Lingbao emphasis on proper textual transmission both in the heavens and on earth and the condemnation of improper textual transmission is covertly directed toward Shangqing. This polemic has been analyzed in detail by Bokenkamp, from whom much of this summary is drawn.⁵⁵

Three hymns of praise appearing separately in the fragments collected and annotated by Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456-536) in the *Declarations of the Perfected* (*Zhen Gao* 真誥) are re-written, appearing as part of a single revelation, in LB #4 (HY 1439), the *Stanzas on Ascending the Mysterium and Pacing the Void* (*Shengxuan buxu zhang* 昇玄步虛章, also titled the *Dongxuan Lingbao Yujingshan buxu jing* 洞玄靈寶玉京山步虛經 [*The Penetrating Mystery Numinous Treasure Scripture from the Jade Capitoline Mountain on Pacing the Void*]), which serve as a prelude to receiving the *Scriptures of Grand Sublimity*, another term for the Lingbao scriptures. Bokenkamp has identified the purpose of Ge Chaofu's re-working of these poems as an attempt "to provide a reference to the Lingbao scriptures in the Shangqing revelations."⁵⁶ Immediately preceding the poem is a passage in which the Duke-Transcendent Ge Xuan explains through an implicit polemic why the Lingbao scriptures were not bestowed upon Xu Mi. The passage reads:

The words of the Supreme Ultimate Perfected Being recited joyously by the myriad transcendents are not to be proclaimed to inferior and common people for they are deposited within the Jade Chamber of the Golden Tower.

太極真人之辭眾仙常所耽誦，不宜於下俗之人，祕藏金闕玉房之內也。

The Duke-Transcendent said: Those to whom the words may be transmitted to are those who have practiced the Lingbao retreat. It is

⁵⁵ Bokenkamp, "Sources," pp. 443-445.

⁵⁶ Bokenkamp, "Sources," p. 444.

impermissible to show them to frivolous disciples. Respect them!
Respect them!

仙公曰: 傳至人修靈寶齋者也, 不可示浮華之徒. 慎之哉! 慎之哉!⁵⁷

The formula for the implicit polemic is as follows: Xu Mi was supposed to receive the Lingbao scriptures at a future time. However, there are clear prerequisites for their transmission, including the practice of the Lingbao retreat. To none other are they allowed to be transmitted. The implication from a “reliable source” (i.e. Ge Xuan) is that if Xu Mi did not receive the Lingbao scriptures, then he did not practice the Lingbao retreat qualifying him for their receipt and is therefore to be classified amongst the “frivolous disciples” to whom they were not permitted. Moreover, Bokenkamp has noted that the poems have been modified in subtle ways. One such emendation in the final line of the Lingbao version of the poem emphasizes Chaofu’s view of Xu Mi’s female Perfected, “who will be my companion in the dust?” (*shu wei chentu chou* 孰為塵土儔) from the *Zhen Gao* version “why should I hasten amidst the dust?” (*he wei chentu qi* 何為塵土).⁵⁸ In Bokenkamp’s analysis:

This emendation reveals Ge Chaofu’s low opinion of the female Perfected who occupied such a prominent place among Yang Xi’s nightly visitors.⁵⁹

The implication is that the Lingbao scriptures were not bestowed upon Xu Mi because he did not practice the Lingbao retreat (*zhai* 齋) before receiving the words of the Perfected but instead spent his time fraternizing with female Perfected who did not adhere to the strictures of textual transmission.

⁵⁷ LB #4 (HY 1439), ZTDZ, no. 1059, 7a.8-7b.1.

⁵⁸ LB #4 (HY 1439), ZTDZ, no. 1059, 8a.4.

⁵⁹ Bokenkamp, “Sources,” p. 445.

Shangqing as a Proscribed Excellence and the Rhetoric of Praise

Several passages in the Lingbao corpus appear to laud the excellence of the Shangqing scriptures. However, that praise is not unqualified, but is itself part of a complex hidden polemic against Shangqing. LB #24 (HY 532), the (*Taiji zhenren fu Lingbao zhajie weiyi zhujing yaojue* 太極真人敷靈寶齋戒威儀諸經要訣), states:

Again, the *Scripture on Great Cavernous Perfection* (the Shangqing *Dadong zhenjing*) in thirty-nine chapters should not be recited among the people. The reason it is so is that it is a scripture of esoteric ascension of the Perfected Way. The Thearchs and Kings of all the heavens descend to welcome it, scattering incense and blossoms, the officers of the great Demon Kings of the Six Heavens who attend to and protect it, proclaiming its blessings, all come and bow their heads to receive their affairs. The spirits and numena of the mountains and seas will all follow as one's servants and messengers. Reciting a single verse, all the heavens arrange rituals – how much more so the demons and spirits? Therefore, one cannot recklessly practice it among the people. The Lingbao scriptures are the utmost scriptures of the Daoist lineage, are the Mysterious Ancestor of the Great Vehicle.

又大洞真經三十九章，不得人間誦。之所以爾者，是真道幽昇之經也。諸天帝王下迎散香花，六天大魔王官屬侍衛稱慶皆來稽首受事。山海神靈莫不從己役使者也。詠之一句，諸天爲設禮，況鬼神乎。故不可人間妄施行矣。靈寶經是道家之至經大乘之玄宗。⁶⁰

At first glance this passage seems quite laudatory in its assessment of the *Dadong zhenjing* and it is easy to understand how it might be understood as unqualified praise. However, the praise is preceded and concluded with the injunction that the *Dadong zhenjing* should not be recited publicly. What is it then about the praise that supports the surprising conclusion that it should not be recited? Therein rests the hidden polemic. The reason the text should not be publicly recited is because of its greatness.

The passage opens with an explicit injunction that the text “should not be recited among the people.” This is because it is a “scripture of esoteric ascension of the

⁶⁰ LB #24 (HY 532) 12b.1-7.

Perfected Way.” In other words, it is supposed to be a secret text. The passage then goes on to describe the great reverence with which the text is handled in the Heavens, describing the spiritual denizens that attend to it and its great potency as further evidence for its secret status. The passage concludes that, given its treatment by the lofty deities in the Heavens above, the profane demons and spirits should do even more to protect its secret status and proper transmission. Therefore, it is not a text that should be casually recited amongst the populace. This argument carries with it the implicit polemic that anyone reciting it in public does not respect the text or its potency and has, in some sense, participated in “leaking” it from the heavens. Again, one is left to wonder if might not have been an indirect assault implying that the Shangqing scriptures were supposed to be well guarded celestial secrets that were disclosed from the Jade Heavens by the female deities cavorting with Yang Xi and the Xu family in the world?

Regardless of the resolution of that question, the text serves an additional function. At a fundamental level, setting aside the rhetoric of praise, this polemic is about “ultimate control in ministering to the spiritual needs of the community” and thereby to sources of patronage, as it prohibits the public recitation of Shangqing scriptures and asserts the superiority of the Lingbao scriptures, proclaiming them the “utmost scriptures of the Daoist lineage” and the “Mysterious Ancestor of the Great Vehicle.” The former asserts the primacy of the Lingbao scriptures in what J.Z. Smith termed a “hierarchy of prestige and ranking” while the latter, through an allusion to the *Daode jing* 道德經, identifies the Lingbao scriptures as the progenitor of the Great Vehicle. Thus, the rhetoric of praise employed toward the *Dadong zhenjing* is designed to lead the reader to the conclusion that, on the one hand, the apex scripture of the Shangqing corpus does not belong in this

world and, on the other hand, the Lingbao scriptures are superior anyway. Thus, the excellence of Shangqing is proscribed, while the excellence of Lingbao is reaffirmed.

A similar injunction is found in LB #25 (HY 344), the (*Taishang Dongxuan Lingbao zhihui benyuan dajie shangpin jing* 太上洞玄靈寶智慧本願大戒上品經), which similarly states, “The *Scripture on Great Cavernous Perfection* ... cannot be transmitted to the general populace. All who would practice and recite it must be practitioners capable in the study of the transcendents” (大洞真經...不可傳凡人也。皆必是能學仙之士所當修誦焉).⁶¹ Here again, we see an injunction against the open transmission of the *Dadong zhenjing*, stipulating that it only be transmitted to advanced practitioners. In this case, the rhetoric of praise serves to curtail the open transmission of the *Dadong zhenjing*, implying an evaluation based on Lingbao standards as a prerequisite for anyone possessing a copy. In short, only those practitioners deemed advanced enough by Lingbao authority should possess the Shangqing scriptures. In short, a concession is made here allowing Shangqing to retain its privileged status among a small number of people but prohibiting it from disseminating widely among the populace, replacing it instead with the Lingbao scriptures.

Following a section of lengthy praise for the *Dadong zhenjing*, *The Upper Fascicle of the Scripture of the Grand Bourne Duke Transcendent of the Left's Questions*, *Taiji Zuoxiangong qingwen jing juanshang* 太極左仙公請問經卷上, LB #26a (S. 1351) states:

If one desires to complete the Way of the *Cavernous Perfection*, it can be recited to bring down cloudy dragons, but it should not be recited among the people. If it is recited among the people the great Demon King will defeat it.... The *Cavernous Perfection* can be the culmination it cannot be

⁶¹ LB #25 (HY 344), 12b.1.

the commencement. Of those who have commenced with it, few there are who have obtained the Way. The remaining scriptures each have an order and a level, they cannot be passed over.

洞真道欲成，可誦之以致雲龍，不得人間誦之。人間誦之，大魔王敗之也 ... 洞真可終不可始，始之者，眇有得道者也。其餘經各有次第階級，不可超矣。⁶²

Again, the passage acknowledges the efficacy of the text in bringing down dragons, but insists that it should not be recited publicly, lest the Demon King defeat the practice. Thus, though suitable as a final text, it is ill suited as a beginning text and the deified Laozi warns that those who have tried to start with it seldom attain the Way, for there is a proper sequence and order to the Daoist scriptures that cannot be circumvented. Here, again the implication is that the Shangqing scriptures have been leaked from the Heavens and should not be allowed to circulate freely. Thus, the Shangqing scriptures are proscribed and the only way to gain authorized access to them is by first mastering the Lingbao scriptures. In his analysis of the preceding passage in S 1351 (lines 36-41) Bokenkamp notes:

Laozi brings to Ge Xuan the comforting message that all religious practices are essentially the same in their fundamental goal, the cultivation of good deeds. Nonetheless, there is a hierarchy of practices; the highest, what he calls the “Great Vehicle” (Dasheng 大乘), being the performance of Lingbao retreats for the salvation of all living beings. Since Laozi has observed the world since the beginnings of time with his “dharma eyes” (*fayan* 法眼), he has a bit to say about both Shangqing Daoism and about Buddhism.⁶³

In asserting a “hierarchy of practices” or, as J.Z. Smith has proposed, a “hierarchy of prestige” Ge Chaofu found a powerful polemic in the Buddhist discourse of the

⁶² *Dunhuang Daozang* 敦煌道藏, p. 2317, lines 13-18.

⁶³ Bokenkamp, “Prehistory of Laozi,” pp. 411-12;

Māhayāna and Hinayāna, and adopted this dichotomy and its rationales, identifying Lingbao as the “Greater Vehicle” and Shangqing as the “Lesser Vehicle.”

Shangqing as a “Lesser Vehicle”

The Trials of the Sages, Zhong Sheng nan (Taishang dongxuan Lingbao miaoqing shiwu zhong Sheng nan 太上洞玄靈寶妙經十五衆聖難) LB #27 (HY 1115) records that Ge Xuan gathered thirty-two of his disciples to Mount Laosheng 勞盛山 on February 11th, 240 to respond to their questions concerning why none of them, though they practiced for hundreds of years, could match his attainments. Ge Xuan revealed that their inability to do so was a result of their quest for individual transcendence through Shangqing practices, an enterprise Ge Xuan characterizes as the “lesser vehicle,” while he has worked for the salvation of all.⁶⁴ The passage in question states:

Only desiring to save yourselves, you have not considered saving others; Studying for yourselves, you have not considered teaching others; Seeking the Way for yourselves, you have not considered others obtaining the Way; You have not believed in the vast and broad words of the great scriptures, not practiced the retreats and the precepts, not venerated the Law Masters of the Three Caverns, and have been fond of and taken joy in the laws of the Lesser Vehicle. Therefore, you have obtained terrestrial transcendence and the Way of corpse-deliverance, thereby coming and going at will, footloose and fancy free, possessing long life and not dying, but not yet having surpassed the Three Realms, roaming throughout the ten directions, you have only gazed upon the Golden Towers of the Jade Capital and that's it. If you desire that the wheel of the Law rise quickly, or to soar throughout all the Shangqing heavens, then you should establish merit and save the king and the people from calamity and suffering. Then, when your great merit is sufficient, the Most High will welcome you!

唯欲度身，不念度人，自學不念教人，自求道不念人得道，不信大經弘遠之辭，不務齋戒，不遵三洞法師，好樂小乘法。故得地仙尸解之道，然亦

⁶⁴ Much of this account has been analyzed for another purpose in chapter 5 of Bokenkamp's book, *Ancestors in Anxiety* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), to whom I am indebted for much of this background information.

出處由意，去來自在，長生不死，但未得超陵三界，遊乎十方，仰瞻太上玉京金闕耳。子欲使法輪速升，飛行上清諸天者，當更立功，救度國王民人灾厄疾苦，大功德滿，太上錫迎子矣。⁶⁵

This passage clearly places the failure of Ge Xuan's students to achieve his level of success to their selfishness and infatuation with individual practices such as the Shangqing. Later in the passage, Ge Xuan explicitly states that his will became fixed on the Great Vehicle (i.e. Lingbao), which is why he was able to ascend to the highest heavens to attend the court of the most exalted gods. Ge Xuan further counters with the assertion that if they really wanted to achieve the individual aims of Shangqing practices they would engage in the Lingbao practices of universal salvation. Lingbao thus becomes a more effective way of practicing Shangqing and of achieving Shangqing goals of individual transcendence. However, an even stronger stance than the polemic of the "Greater Vehicle" is evident in other passages, in which the very potency of Shangqing resides in the Lingbao.

Lingbao as the Hidden Potency of Shangqing

In another passage in LB #24 (HY 532), great praise is heaped upon Shangqing, yet underlying that praise is a covert polemic against Shangqing that undermines its very efficacy. The passage reads:

The *Cavernous Perfection* in 39 chapters was spoken by thirty-nine Perfected – it is unproduced script. These Perfected have simply transmitted it. These beings are the perfected Qi of the Way and its Potency that merged and transformed in the Self-Generating to become Perfected Beings. They are the companions of Laozi. If they were not people who studied the Way or who were not people who had arrived at sufficient merit through generations of past-life graces through inexhaustible eons of time, then none of them would have been able to

⁶⁵ LB #27 (HY 1115), 1b.6-2a.3.

accord with this righteousness. All their teachings are of the self-generated palace rooms of the unexcelled Three Heavens with their myriad creatures, mountains, and streams. Their mountains and streams and myriad creatures have names the same as in our world, but it is not the case that they are worldly mountains, streams, and myriad creatures – they are all self-generated phenomena – this can be heard of, but is difficult to argue against. The Jade Clarity scriptures of cavernous perfection are broadly outline their meaning, but are unable to explain in precise detail every strand. How wondrously unfathomable! Those who serve them arrive at great blessings, their bodies obtain long life and their ancestral temple is pacified. Reciting them one becomes a king of Perfected Beings, their Way is unexcelled.

洞真三十九篇，三十九真人說之者。蓋無生之文矣。此真傳出之耳。其入道德真氣混化自然成真人，老子之儔矣。經歷無窮之劫，非學道之人也，世人非宿恩至功德滿足得洞真經者，莫能和此義。所道者皆是無上三天自然宮室萬物山川，其山川萬物名有世上同者，非世之山川萬物也。皆自然物，可聞難辯。洞真玉清經畧解，其義不能覩縷，豈可思議也。奉之致大福，身得長生，宗廟安寧，誦之成真人之王，其道無上。⁶⁶

At first glance, this passage seems extremely favorable toward Shangqing, bestowing great prestige upon the Perfected Beings who revealed the scriptures as well as to the heavens they emanated from. Indeed, Wang Chengwen cites this passage as evidence to support his claim that Shangqing was highly venerated by Lingbao. However, he omits the crucial last line in his discussion, thereby missing the polemical undertones, which reads:

In the past, those who obtained the Way of Higher Transcendence and Utmost Perfection are all those who served the Numinous Treasure scriptures.

昔之得上仙，至真之道，皆是奉靈寶經者也。⁶⁷

This last line asserts that, regardless of how great the Shangqing scriptures and Perfected Beings who transmitted them may have been those who attained the Shangqing path in this life served the Lingbao scriptures in past lives and more importantly achieved their

⁶⁶ LB #24 (HY 532) 19b.1-20a.1.

⁶⁷ LB #24 (HY 532) 20a.1-2.

current success in Shangqing because of their former loyalty to Lingbao. Thus, Lingbao is posited as the true potency behind success in Shangqing practice. The polemical implication is that Shangqing has no efficacy in and of itself, but is only viable because of Lingbao. A simple breakdown of the implicit polemic, then, is:

Shangqing is wonderful, great, and unsurpassed → Lingbao is the true potency behind Shangqing → Lingbao is truly wonderful, great, and unsurpassed → Shangqing is an empty vessel.

Thus, all the praise given to Shangqing is then redirected toward Lingbao and the rhetoric of praise simply uses Shangqing as a vessel or conduit for praising Lingbao, the true but hidden potency. As such, any praise given to Shangqing automatically applies in infinitely greater amounts to a Lingbao tradition that is both hierarchically and spatially superior and that is the potency of Shangqing anyway. A more explicit version of this polemic exists in the story of the past life of Laozi as the phoenix daughter.

The past life in question was once contained in the *Upper Chapters of Original Undertakings* (*Benye shangpin* 本業上品; LB #13), which exists now only in a Dunhuang fragment (P. 3022) and lengthy citations in the late 6th century *Wushang biyao* 無上祕要 (HY 1130, 15:1a-8a.7) and Zhang Junfang's 張君房 (fl. 1008-1025) early 11th century *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤 (HY 1026, 101.12b.9-14b.8).⁶⁸ The portions of the story relevant to our study of Shangqing polemics focus, not on the phoenix daughter but on her mother.⁶⁹

According to the account, many kalpa-cycles ago the king of the paradise world of *Weiluo* captured a Numinous Phoenix chick born in his realm. He gave the chick as a

⁶⁸ For a fuller introduction and summary of the story see Bokenkamp, "The Prehistory of Laozi," pp. 417-18.

⁶⁹ For Bokenkamp's summary of the story, which focuses largely on the phoenix daughter who would be reborn as Laozi rather than on the mother of interest here, see Bokenkamp, "The Prehistory of Laozi," p. 418.

present to his is eldest daughter Pei Ying, a princess he was extremely fond of and often played with. The princess raised the phoenix and kept it by her constantly. The Numinous Phoenix frequently (or perhaps “once”) fanned her face with its two wings and she miraculously conceived in her twelfth year. Three months later the king noticed something strange and became suspicious. Misunderstanding, he beheaded the phoenix and buried it in a mound. The princess subsequently gave birth to a daughter who could speak from the moment she hit the ground.⁷⁰ Eight years later the princess still sequestered in the palace by her father had no appetite for even the finest foods. For a great blizzard lasting an entire year had fallen upon the land. The snow was over ten feet deep and the birds and animals were all starving. The princess, filled with compassion, prayed for their relief and in response another numinous phoenix arrived and took her to the mound where her beheaded phoenix was buried. Peering down on it she recited:

So far away, my numinous phoenix,
 E'er unfolding, this long return home.
 Troubled, troubled are my thoughts,
 Everything always goes against my wishes.
 For myriad kalpas we have no meeting date,
 When will you come flying?

杳杳靈鳳，綿綿長歸。
 悠悠我思，永與願違。
 萬劫無期，何時來飛？⁷¹

Thereupon, the phoenix that had been beheaded by the king suddenly came alive. It hugged the princess and they flew off together into the clouds. Presently, the princess has received documents atop the Phosphorous Imperion giving her the celestial rank of Upper Primal Sovereign of the Southern Extremities where she frequently rides a nine-

⁷⁰ The Phoenix Daughter, who is the physical incarnation of the celestial Lingbao deity “Illustrious Ancient Lord of the White Numina” (Haoling Huanglao jun 皓靈皇老君), one of the Five Ancient Lords, goes on in the story to demonstrate her own virtue and mass her own merit, eventually being reborn as Laozi.

⁷¹ *YJQQ*, 101.13b.3-4.

colored phoenix. The most important aspect of this story for our purposes is what follows:

This woman had in previous lives already served the Numinous Treasure for ten thousand eons, which resulted in the Numinous Phoenix's bodily descent and her obtaining the estate and title of Upper Primal Sovereign of the Southern Extremities.

此女前生萬劫,已奉《靈寶》,致靈鳳降形,得封南極元君之號。⁷²

The story explicitly asserts that the mother of the Phoenix Daughter received the visitation by the Numinous Phoenix and her rank of *Nanji yuanjun* because she had served Lingbao for countless eons in her previous lives. This is the reason she was graced with the immaculate conception of the Phoenix Daughter. How does this comprise a polemic?

The title *yuanjun* is a Shangqing innovation, appearing about a dozen times in the *Zhen Gao*, referring to female Perfected. Thus, Laozi's mother becomes a Shangqing female Perfected through her devotion to Lingbao during countless previous eons of time. Moreover, although unattested in the fragments collected in the *Zhen Gao*, *Nanji yuanjun* is, in fact, one of the female Perfected who descended to Yang Xi, bestowing upon him at least three poems, two of which still exist with a brief hagiography in *juan 97* of the *Yunji Qiqian* 雲笈七籤 (HY 1032) under the title "Nanji Wang furen shou Yangxi shi sanshou" 南極王夫人授楊羲詩三首。⁷³ Thus, this story asserts that a known Shangqing Perfected achieved her station in the Shangqing pantheon because of her devotion to Lingbao, making Lingbao the true potency of Shangqing. Given, the general misogyny

⁷² *YJQQ* 101.13b.6-7.

⁷³ The two extant poems in the collection, accompanied by a brief hagiography, seem typical of the Shangqing "seduction song" in which the female Perfected offers words of encouragement to an earthly betrothed. For a translation of this type of poetry see Paul W. Kroll, "Seduction Songs of One of the Perfected," in Robert Lopez ed., *Religions of China in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 180-185.

of the Lingbao scriptures, it makes sense that she was originally a Shangqing deity who was appropriated for a Lingbao polemic asserting that the Numinous Treasure was the secret potency of Shangqing.

Conclusion

While a good deal of attention has rightly been paid to the issue of Buddho-Daoist polemics, this study has sought to delineate the internal polemics of two Chinese religious traditions in southern China in the 4th century C.E. as a means of exploring the interaction, competition, and tension involving the two powerful aristocratic families behind Lingbao and Shangqing Daoism against the backdrop of the spiritual and political colonization of the Eastern Jin Dynasty. The insights gleaned have further benefited from J.Z. Smith's theoretical constructs of the "proximate other" and from Yairah Amit's taxonomy of implicit, explicit, and hidden polemics, borrowed from her work on the Hebrew Bible. The polemics of the early Lingbao scriptures against Shangqing have proved excellent for applying her rubric as a case study of the interaction between two early medieval Chinese religious movements in competition with each other for prestige and patronage.

In the formulation of Shangqing Daoism resulting from the communications of female Perfected from the Highest Clarity heavens to the Xu family through the spirit medium Yang Xi, which unveiled hitherto unknown reaches of exaltation, the Xu family initiated an implicit polemic on the spiritual traditions venerated by the descendents of Ge Hong, to whom the Xu family were related by marriage. Furthermore, at a time when the Ge family seemed poised to join the burgeoning Shangqing movement, Yang Xi

explicitly belittled the status of Ge Xuan, an already established master of esoteric arts with a hagiographic tradition of his own. This explicit polemic laid the foundation for the formulation and emergence of Lingbao as a response, not only to Buddhism, to Northern Celestial Masters, or even to longstanding southern religious practices, but most immediately to their close neighbors of the nascent Shangqing community.

This response was comprised of several intertwined polemics that sought not only to assert the spiritual ascendancy of Lingbao over Shangqing, but by so doing, the prestige and spiritual pedigree of the Ge family over the Xu's and Yang Xi. Throughout the Lingbao scriptures, assertions of the spatial, temporal, and doctrinal superiority are made in opposition to the "proximate other" of Shangqing through a combination of no less than five implicit and covert polemics. The first polemic followed the Shangqing pattern, which asserted its own superiority over Celestial Masters by locating previously unknown heavens of higher exaltation. By asserting that the Lingbao heavens were even more exalted and located higher in the spatial hierarchy, the Lingbao corpus implicitly asserted that Shangqing was spatially and hierarchically inferior to Lingbao.

The second and perhaps most "hidden" or covert polemic condemns the Shangqing as divulged celestial secrets leaked from the heavens at the inappropriate time by the female Perfected. The clues of this polemic reside in the Lingbao emphasis on proper textual transmission and timed release as well as in several re-written Shangqing poems appearing in the early Lingbao corpus that intimate that the Shangqing scriptures were preparatory for Xu Mi's ultimate receipt of the Lingbao scriptures, which he failed to realize because of his unworthiness.

Much of the scholarly work stating that Shangqing is venerated, praised, or incorporated into Lingbao is derived from an incomplete reading of passages pertaining to the third polemic, which presents Shangqing as a proscribed excellence within a rhetoric of praise. This rhetoric of praise camouflages the restriction of public transmission and recitation of Shangqing scriptures such as the *Dadong zhenjing* through elaborating its celestial excellence and the great care it receives in the heaven. Moreover, combined with the polemical emphasis on proper textual transmission and the stringent condemnation of those “frivolous disciples” who disrespect the potency of the text by participating in the dissemination of Shangqing scriptures, this polemic sought to effectively proscribes the transmission and dissemination of Shangqing through public recitation. In tandem with this polemic was the notion that there was a proper level and order to spiritual progression. Within this sequential hierarchy, Lingbao asserted its precedence over Shangqing through its insistence that practitioners could not skip levels of practice, thus redirecting would-be Shangqing practitioners toward Lingbao.

The fourth polemic fully embraces the Buddhist dichotomy of the “Greater” and “Lesser” Vehicle, positing Lingbao, with its emphasis on universal salvation as the “Greater Vehicle” and condemning Shangqing, with its individual practice, as the “Lesser Vehicle.” It is also argued that, as the Greater Vehicle, Lingbao is a more effective means of attaining Shangqing goals.

The fifth and final polemic identified in this study asserts that Lingbao is, in fact, the hidden or secret potency of Shangqing. In this polemic success and station in Shangqing is identified as the result of devotion to Lingbao in previous lives. This polemic is best exemplified in the example of the female Perfected Nanji Yuanjun, a

known Shangqing deity who descended to Yang Xi and bestowed several poems upon him. In the Lingbao scriptures, she is identified as a princess in a prior world system who conceives immaculately to give birth to a phoenix daughter who is later reborn as Laozi. The story explicitly states that she was honored with the grace of birthing the phoenix daughter and bestowed her rank as a female Perfected because she had served Lingbao in countless previous lives.

Given the manner in which many of these polemics are intertwined within the same scriptures, it is impossible at this stage of knowledge to locate a particular stance or polemical tact within a given layer in the development of the early Lingbao corpus. Perhaps as our understanding of the formation and development of this corpus of texts matures the presence of these polemical strands will help us identify the various hands that wove such a complex religious tapestry together. At the very least, this study has identified the pigments of polemics infusing that tapestry as a whole, pigments that have remained largely unacknowledged and which retain the residue of a vibrant period of religious competition in southern China in the 4th century.

The exact impact of these polemics remains shrouded in the mists of time. However, what is clear is that the early Lingbao corpus rapidly achieved immense popularity after its timed release in 400. For, shortly thereafter in 404, Xu Mi's son and Ge Chaofu's in-law Xu Huangmin 許黃民 (361-429) relocated eastward to the Shan 剡 mountain regions in eastern Zhejiang, taking with him what original Shangqing scriptures remained in Jurong.⁷⁴ The popularity of the Numinous Treasure ensured the Ge family an enduring legacy in the Daoist religion and succeeded, at least temporarily, through a

⁷⁴ cf. Strickmann, "Maoshan," p. 16; Bokenkamp, "Sources," pp. 448-449.

variety of explicit, implicit, and hidden polemics asserting its' temporal, spatial, cosmological, hierarchical, sequential, and doctrinal superiority, in surpassing the "other" Daoism in town.